

The Nation

Reviews.

THE BRONTËS AS POETS.

"Brontë Poems: Selections from the Poetry of Charlotte, Emily, Anne, and Branwell Brontë" Edited, with an Introduction, by ARTHUR C. BENSON. (Smith, Elder. 3s. 6d. net.)

I.

In his introduction to this volume, Mr. Benson says: "It may frankly be confessed that the interest of the poems is entirely centred on the work of Emily. If it had not been for the genius which her work unmistakably displays, the poetry of the other three would have sunk into oblivion." If this is so, we may very reasonably ask why nearly half the book should be given up to this other negligible work: why Emily's genius should have to carry this dead weight about with it, because the dead weight happens to be the property of her relations. And dead weight it unquestionably is. Of Branwell we shall have a word to say later, but of both Charlotte and Anne the plain fact is that they were not poets at all. The verse of both has a certain biographical interest, and speaks truly enough of the sincerity of character of two women who did work of lasting distinction in another form of literature. For this reason it is not insignificant, but it is already easily accessible to those who wish to consult it for these values, and we see no good reason for reprinting it in a book for which the only occasion can be its poetical quality. In all the pages devoted to Charlotte's and Anne's verse, there is not a line that has the unmistakable flavor of poetry. There would appear to be an exception on page 16, in the poem beginning

"Gods of the old mythology,"

and definitely marked by a sombre poetic imagination throughout its sixteen lines. It is here printed as Charlotte's work, but there is an editorial note saying, "This poem has been in some collections attributed to Emily Brontë." It was first printed under Mr. Shorter's editorship in Emily's collected poetry in 1910, and we do not know that it has been reprinted since, nor does Mr. Benson give any authority for this new attribution. By every internal evidence it is clearly Emily's; if Mr. Benson can make good Charlotte's claim to it, he establishes for her a moment of genuine poetic inspiration such as never revisited her.

All this is not in any way to detract from the fine gifts that made so memorable contributions to the English novel, but merely to guard against the danger—evident from the plan of such volumes as the one before us—of allowing these gifts to lend other activities an authority that their own achievement does not warrant. When we say that Ruskin and Carlyle made a very poor job of their attempts to write poetry, we do not belittle their noble powers, and we can still be wholly grateful for "Jane Eyre," while saying that there is no reason, other than those already mentioned, for printing Charlotte Brontë's verses. They have none of the emotional pressure that forces itself into rhythmic pattern of expression, no trace of the perfect selection and ordering of words that are the tokens of complete imaginative experience, nor has it even any share of the metrical precision and polish that gave so much eighteenth-century verse its own distinction without giving it the higher character of poetry. It not only does not move us; it does not give us the pleasure that comes of witnessing expert accomplishment. In Anne's verse there is an occasional note of faintly charming ingenuousness, but it is rare, and her claim to poetry is as little real as Charlotte's.

II.

Of a great deal of Emily Brontë's verse, very much the same thing must be said as of that of her sisters. It bears the stamp of character as clearly, and her character was the rarest and most impressive of them all. But in doing this it does no more than confirm, without notably emphasizing, facts which have been evident from every word that has been written of her from the time of Charlotte's letters. Again, we have to keep our minds clear as to our demands. Impressive and heroic character is of inestimable value in the world's business, but if Emily's work did no more than bear witness to such character, her distinction would be a far commoner thing than it actually is. And there is much of her verse that does hardly anything more than this. We say hardly, since there is often, even in her poorest work, an undeveloped but not wholly uninteresting instinct for rhythmic individuality. The instinct is not very adventurous, not sufficiently so, we think, to justify Mr. Benson's remark that "many of Emily's poems are bound to appeal most vividly to those who have a technical understanding of the craft of poetry." Most of Emily's verse is not particularly interesting to the student of poetic technique, but it has just a touch of rhythmic independence, and chiefly in the practice of packing a line so as to give it an added fullness and rapidity while retaining the exact stress value, as in—

"I am the only being whose doom
No tongue would ask, no eye would mourn,"

and

"As they were playing the pillars 'mong
And bounding down the marble stair."

It is, of course, a device common enough in English poetry, but its use does show a care for the capacities of verse not to be found in the ordinary rhymester, and in the hands of a master it is capable of producing such splendid results as Swinburne was constantly achieving. And yet Mr. Benson, as though to refute himself at any cost—since here is the best support of his statement about the technical interest of Emily's verse—curiously tells us in footnotes that she used "being" and "playing" as monosyllables—*beng* and *plang*, thus depriving her of the credit for some technical skill, and accusing her of incredible pronunciation.

But even this interest added to its biographical value does not endow Emily Brontë's verse with any considerable poetic significance, and most of it, which has no more than these qualities, stands as little chance as Charlotte's or Anne's of receiving durable attention for its own sake. It has, this bulk of it, a greater intellectual gravity than theirs, a more apparent responsibility; it has also an occasional phrase that almost thrills, as "shadowy fiend," and very often vague indications of an intention towards poetry, of the poetic energy hidden away in the mind but seeking release. But as we read on through the work of her earlier years, we find page after page of these elusive suggestions that fail over and over again to shape themselves into poetry.

"The moonbeam and the storm,
The summer eve divine,
The silent night of solemn calm,
The full moon's cloudless shine."

"Were once entwined with thee,
But now with weary pain,
Lost vision! 'tis enough for me,
Thou canst not shine again."

It is general, indefinite, diffused, made up of easily accepted imagery—all of which poetry exactly is not. The sombre strength of Emily's very character itself for many years could find little but conventional expression, a rather hectic violence that may well have derived from the lesser side of Gray. "Froze upon my tongue," "their deadly ray would more than madden me," "wild blast," "dreary doom,"

"frenzied thoughts," "frantic curses"—all these are from one poem, written when she was twenty. With the exception of some undated work at the end of the collection, which we may assume to be roughly in its right place, the poems are given in chronological order. There is, from the beginning, a development of the qualities that we have mentioned; but not until 1841, when she was twenty-three, do we find anything more than the suggestion that here is a sincerely intentioned talent that might in a fortunate moment expand into poetic intensity. Then the suggestion becomes a reasonable hope, with the second stanza of "The Caged Bird":—

"Give we the hills our equal prayer,
Earth's breezy hills and heaven's blue sea;
I ask for nothing further here
But my own heart and liberty."

The achievement is not yet, but it has come nearer. There is in these lines a new precision of statement, a quickening in her use of words, a tightening up of the symmetry. A little later, in 1843, we come to

"Leaves upon Time's branch were growing brightly,
Full of sap, and full of silver dew;
Birds beneath its shelter gathered nightly;
Daily round its flowers the wild bees flew.

"Sorrow passed, and plucked the golden blossom;
Guilt stripped off the foliage in its pride;
But, within its parent's kindly bosom,
Flowed for ever Life's restoring tide."

The hope has become an assurance. The poetry has not come into unblemished life, but that poetry is seeking deliverance there can no longer be any doubt. And in less than a year we have "A Day Dream," simple, indeed, and not of uniform certainty in its flight, but showing an athletic imagination coming into its own. Then, as far as we can tell from the recorded dates, for another year, with the exception of a formless and unsuccessful poem with good touches in it (which Mr. Benson quotes in his introduction but does not include in his selection), there is silence, to be broken by "Remembrance," with its superb

"Cold in the earth—and fifteen wild Decembers,
From those brown hills, have melted into spring,"

and thereafter we have a poet who is never sure of proving herself for long together, but who repeatedly achieves the note that makes her rank secure against any challenge. The poems we have named, together with "Warning and Reply," the song beginning "The linnet in the rocky dells," "How clear she shines," "Plead for me," "Self-Interrogation," "The Old Stoic," "A little while," "The Moors," and "No coward soul is mine," and stray lines such as

"It was the autumn of the year,
When grain grows yellow in the ear."

and

"The herons are flown to their trees by the Hall,"
and this, as spoken by the wind—

"And when thy heart is resting
Beneath the church-aisle stone,
I shall have time for mourning,
And thou for being alone,"

make but a small gathering, but they give to the author of one of the most passionate novels in the language the yet higher distinction of having enriched for ever the store of English poetry.

III.

There remains to be considered the surviving work of Branwell Brontë. It covers but a few pages: in Mr. Benson's selection, which we take as being representative, less than twenty. Branwell's story has been told many times, and always with the same conclusion. He had a good deal of natural charm, and a character that was for himself and his friends tragic in its weakness. "At home he is a drain on every resource—an impediment to all happiness," wrote Charlotte, who loved him; Swinburne, with customary vehemence, calls him a "contemptible caitiff"; Mr. Shorter in the admirably arranged chapter on Branwell in his Brontë book, emphasizes the general opinion; "his memory now craves that of our charity, we leave it alone," says Mr. Birrell, allowing, justly we think, that "had he been well bred and trained, and duly kicked and disciplined, he might

have escaped a shocking fate and a disgraceful death." There is no disputing the facts; Branwell, whatever allowances may be made for him, was a moral weakling, a disaster to his family, and he drank or drugged himself to death. But that was not the whole tragedy. From the evidence of these few pages, he also destroyed a poet, and it is more than likely that he himself suffered most in the destruction. In this matter there has been much confusion. In their very natural indignation with a man who repaid the patience and love of his heroic sisters so ill, his critics have commonly refused to allow Branwell anything of what Mr. Gaskell called his "brilliant talent." "He did no more than write poor verses," says one; "of his sisters' gifts he had not a particle," says another. Mr. Benson, who insists as clearly as his predecessors upon "the catastrophe of his life," does well, if the comparison had to be made, to say that "he had a higher instinct for poetry than either Charlotte or Anne," though he does so apologetically. The fact is that in Branwell was wrecked a quite notable poetic endowment, and neither truth nor morality is served by refusing to acknowledge the endowment because of the wreck. It may well be that in any poet who has achieved highly and used his gift worthily and fully, the balance of character can be shown to be with nobility, but that a man may woefully abuse it is as true of this gift as of any other. Although we may hopefully believe that such lamentable wastage is rare, yet even the great responsibility of poetry may sometimes be betrayed, as it was betrayed here, and to relieve Branwell of the responsibility altogether by denying his gift, and so to make his tragedy commonplace instead of realizing its last bitterness, is to trifle with facts. Save for a moment now and then, the poetry in Branwell was strangled, but when we read a short poem, "Noah's Warning over Methusaleh's Grave," the general level of which hardly falls below that of its best stanzas,

"Will you compel my tongue to say,
That underneath this nameless sod,
Your hands, with mine, have laid to-day,
The last on earth who walked with God?
* * * * *

"By that vast wall of cloudy gloom,
Piled boding round the firmament;
By all its presages of doom,
Children of men—Repent! Repent!"

and find in another place,

"But all without lay silent in
The sunny hush of afternoon,
And only muffled steps within
Passed slowly and sedately on,"

and remember that the man who could, in spite of himself, write thus, living until he was past thirty, left what amounts to no more than a momentary gesture in witness of the precious gift that was there for his taking, the tragedy becomes far more poignant than it has commonly been shown to be.

A STUDY IN POVERTY.

"Livelihood and Poverty: A Study in the Economic Conditions of Working-Class Households in Northampton, Warrington, Stanley, and Reading." By A. L. BOWLEY and A. R. BURNETT-HURST. (Bell. 3s. 6d. net.)

At present, the attention of the whole nation is focussed on one object, and every nerve is strained to bring the war to an early and victorious end. We stand aghast before the infinite suffering which it is causing—all the physical torture, all the anguish of heart and soul. Never in her history, however, has Great Britain been more determined to achieve a purpose which she has set before her, and even now there are signs that her efforts will eventually be crowned with success. But although it is essential that for the time the thought and strength of the nation should be mainly given to matters directly concerned with the war, we must not wholly forget the urgent social problems which pleaded for a solution before the war-cloud broke, and which will plead yet more urgently after peace has been declared.

Professor Bowley and Mr. Burnett-Hurst have set before us very clearly some of the most pressing of these problems. They have made a detailed and scientific inquiry

into social conditions in four towns—Reading, Warrington, Stanley, and Northampton, and their book embodies its results.

The methods of inquiry were very similar to those adopted by Mr. Charles Booth, in his monumental investigation into "Life and Labor in London," and in investigations made in York, West Ham, and elsewhere. The present inquiry, therefore, is not only of interest on its own account, but as showing how far conditions already revealed in other places are typical. Hitherto the number of towns investigated has been small, and would-be optimists could, with some show of impartiality, comfort themselves with the belief, or at any rate with the hope, that the state of the workers generally was much better than in the towns whose conditions had been revealed. But, unfortunately for their peace of mind, these fresh statistics, based on inquiries in four towns varying very widely in industrial conditions, confirm the main conclusions to which previous investigations pointed, that although social conditions vary considerably in different towns, almost everywhere a large proportion of the population and an appallingly large proportion of children are in a state of primary poverty—i.e., belong to families which, through no fault of their own, are so poor that they cannot pay for the bare necessities of physical efficiency, let alone for those little extras which are so necessary to give color and zest to life.

Taking the working-classes of Reading, Warrington, Stanley, and Northampton, no less than 16 per cent. of them, and 27 per cent. of the children, were found to be living in primary poverty, and these figures take no account of those families (probably much greater in number, but regarding which no statistics were collected) who were in "secondary" poverty—i.e., in poverty because of wasteful expenditure. In York, in 1889, I found 15½ per cent. of the wage-earning class in "primary," and 28 per cent. in "secondary" poverty.

"Actually one-half of the households below the (primary) poverty line at Warrington and Reading, nearly one-half at York, and one-third at Northampton, were living in poverty because the wages of the head of the household were so low that he could not support a family of three children or less." "It is thus proved (say the writers) that a great part of the poverty revealed by our inquiries—and we have no reason to regard their results as other than representative—is not intermittent but permanent, not accidental or due to exceptional misfortune, but a regular feature of the industries of the towns concerned. It can hardly be too emphatically stated that of all the causes of primary poverty which have been brought to our notice, low wages are by far the most important. We would go further and say that to raise the wages of the worst-paid workers is the most pressing social task with which the country is confronted to-day."

And it must never be forgotten that the situation is really worse than that which is revealed at any given moment, for, as the authors say:—

"The main incidence of poverty is among families where there are three or more children below school age, and no subsidiary earners. It follows that many other families have passed through this stage, and only risen out of it when the children began to earn, and that another large number recently married will, if conditions do not alter, fall into poverty as the third or fourth child is born. The proportion of children, therefore, who during some part of the first fourteen years of their lives are in primary poverty, is considerably greater even than that found in an instantaneous survey."

These are perhaps the most vital and the most disquieting facts brought to light by this exceedingly valuable inquiry. But it has elicited many other points of high sociological interest.

Important information about housing conditions is given for each town, and it is shown that, on the average, for every pound that families with incomes between 20s. and 25s. a week spend on food, clothing, and other necessities of life, they have to pay from 5s. to 7s. for house-room.

In Reading, where wages are lowest, and where they are "probably prevented from rising by the low scale of agricultural wages in Berkshire and Oxfordshire," rents are highest. It is important to notice the comparative economic weakness of unskilled workers living in towns surrounded by agricultural districts where low wages are paid.

Exceedingly bad housing conditions prevail in Stanley,

a mining town with 23,000 inhabitants. The investigators remark that "it is little short of horrifying to discover that one-half of all the working-class houses in that town are overcrowded," and they state further that 20 per cent. of them had only two rooms. These facts remind us of another social evil crying aloud for remedy, namely, the exceptionally bad conditions under which many miners are housed.

The evil effects of bad housing are illustrated by figures showing the death-rate in the Warrington slums, where, in 1911, out of 1,000 children born, no fewer than 285 died before the first birthday! And yet, after describing the conditions of a number of poor houses, we read: "That this state of affairs could be remedied is beyond question, for close at hand to these districts, and in the very heart of the town, are large areas of entirely unoccupied land."

The inquiry throws valuable light on the relative degrees of responsibility for the support of dependents which falls respectively on men and women. Excluding Reading, for which figures are not given, it seems that in 96½ per cent. of the households, the chief wage earner is a man, and only in 3½ per cent. is it a woman.

The statistician's "average family" of man, wife, and three dependent children is comparatively rare. This fact does not militate against the argument that in fixing wages the cost of maintaining an "average family" should be borne in mind, for although at a given moment comparatively few families represent that average, probably nearly every family where there are eventually as many as three children represents it sooner or later, for a period of years.

The whole book gives evidence of care, not only in the collection of information, but in the assessment of its statistical value; and wherever the data on which statistics or figures are based are regarded as inadequate or doubtful, the fact is frankly stated. Nowhere is there any evidence of an attempt to make out a case—the inquiry has obviously been impartial and strictly scientific. The writers have never let their feelings run away with them. There are no lurid passages, and yet, as we lay down the book, a sense of oppression comes over us, and we are conscious that, as a nation, we are doing a grave injustice to millions of our fellow-countrymen. We are narrowing their horizon and impoverishing their lives.

What a tragedy it is that year after year and decade after decade we complacently allow social conditions to continue which not only cause about a quarter of a million unnecessary deaths every year—a number far greater than the British are likely to lose in the war—but which condemn millions of our fellow-subjects to a state of permanent physical inefficiency! It is not only uncommonly bad business, but a denial of the rights of brotherhood and citizenship.

Of course, all social wrongs cannot be righted at once, and even earnest and single-minded reformers may differ as to the causes and the remedies of certain conditions. But there are many evils which continue solely because of public indifference and the selfishness of the possessing classes. We all know that if a tithe of the enthusiasm and an insignificant fraction of the cost involved in the present effort to push back the German line in Flanders were devoted to the abolition of slums, every one of them would disappear within five years. And yet it is probable that to-day more than 2,000,000 men, women, and children are living, as their forbears lived, amid housing conditions which constitute a heavy handicap on health and happiness.

Again, to repeat a quotation from the writers of the book "to raise the wages of the worst paid workers is the most pressing social task with which the country is confronted to-day." This can be done. Already trade boards have been established in certain trades. Let this method, which has been tried and proved effective, be at once so extended as to comprise every low-paid industry.

Similarly, the remedy of other evils to which this book draws our attention only awaits determination on the part of the country and of statesmen. It is to be devoutly hoped that the deeper sense of seriousness which has come over the nation, and our fresh realization of what is possible to a united and earnest people, will make us impatient of the slow social progress of the past, and hasten the time when the millions who have lost or never found their birthright, shall enter into it gladly, as children of an empire built on comradeship and justice.

B. SEEBOHM ROWNTREE.

AIRCRAFT IN WAR.

"**Aircraft in the Great War : A Record and Study.**" By CLAUDE GRAHAME-WHITE and HARRY HARPER. (Fisher Unwin. 7s. 6d. net.)

It is a little more than eight years since Santos Dumont accomplished his first flight of 230 yards with a biplane near Paris. It is not quite six years since Blériot flew across the Channel. These were epoch-making events, which caused a world-wide sensation. But to-day, flights of a few miles over land and water are mere trifling performances. The aeroplane has ceased to be a marvel. Airmen could once make small fortunes in a single summer; their wages have now fallen to the level of a first-class chauffeur's pay.

So far, in times of peace, the new invention has been chiefly used for mere sport and display. Its practical applications have been almost entirely for war purposes. Indeed, we may say that its rapid improvement has been chiefly due to this fact. The possible uses of aircraft in war were foreseen at a very early date. After one of his first flights Wilbur Wright said to his brother, "This is chiefly a military proposition." It was the use of the aeroplane for war purposes that opened for manufacturers the prospect of large orders, and made all the great governments willing to spend money freely in experimental work.

The new invention was first used for scouting purposes in the Italian War in Tripoli. It was recognized that this would be its chief use, though even at this early date attempts were made to bombard Turkish positions from the air. In the Balkan War of 1912 there were a few aeroplanes on both sides, mostly manned by neutral adventurers, but they effected next to nothing. The French found them useful in scouting and keeping their columns in touch in the desert warfare in Morocco, and their experimental work showed that airmen could be very useful as observers directing the fire of artillery. But the use of aircraft on a large scale in naval and military operations dates from the present war.

Messrs. Grahame-White and Harper's work is, we believe, the first in which an attempt has been made to sum up the experience thus obtained. Mr. Grahame-White is one of the pioneers of aerial navigation, and he has been on active service since the war began. Mr. Harper is one of our best-known writers on the subject, and the collaboration of two such authorities gives a special value to the book. There is, of course, one drawback. The war is still in progress, and the authors cannot tell us all they know, but they have much to relate that is of the deepest interest, not only from the scientific, but from the mere human point of view. For the book is full of stirring stories of the reckless daring of British, French, and German airmen over land and sea.

Six months of war experience confirm the forecast that scouting would be the most important work of the aeroplane. The number of machines and of skilled pilots on both sides has been in no way adequate to the enormous forces engaged and the huge extension of the battle front. But even so, aerial reconnaissance has proved a most important factor in the operations. We are still in the period of beginnings, and the full effect of the new arm will not be seen till both the airmen and the commander whom he serves have become more used to the new conditions. But our authors tell us that—

"The work of the scouting aeroplane has been of supreme importance; and almost always its flights have been useful—augmenting but not superseding the patrol work of cavalry. To determine its exact effect on strategy is not easy; the factors are confusing. There is the abnormal length of battle fronts to be considered, the huge masses of men employed, also the use of motor transport and the general speeding up of operations. But this much can be said: the aeroplane has rendered trebly important the factors of time and distance, and the commander-in-chief is most successful who, adapting the tactics of Napoleon to these new conditions of war, strikes a blow so rapid and crushing at a point where his enemy is weakest, that even if this blow is seen by the air scouts as it impends, it is struck so quickly and with such irresistible force that detection cannot rob it of success."

In the days before flying became a reality, and when commanders relied chiefly on cavalry reconnaissance, it was all-important to drive in the enemy's cavalry screen

and thus obtain information for oneself while denying it to the opponent. It was anticipated that with the coming of the airmen there would be similar battles between the flying men on one side and those on the other. If a General could drive away or destroy all his opponents' air scouts, he would have the command of the air. His enemy would be blind, while he could see, and such an advantage would go far to secure victory. In the present war the airmen have been too few for either side to attempt to obtain this ideal command of the air. In future wars there may perhaps be great air battles like the clash of opposing screens of cavalry in the wars of the past. But in the present war there have only been local skirmishes. Our authors give us the stories of many of these new incidents of warfare—duels between aeroplanes, or the pursuit of hostile air raiders by our own flying men. Already one sees the beginning of a new kind of tactics; thus, for instance, we hear of the use of clouds as an ambush or a means of escape for the aviator. In one narrative we are told how a German aeroplane got away by dashing into a great mass of cloud, and then apparently changing direction while thus hidden, so that it came out at a point where it was not expected. It was like a fugitive on the ground escaping by bolting into a wood, and doubling away at an angle while thus concealed. On both sides the most reckless daring has been displayed in these air duels but we are warned that it is not always easy to get the precise details of what happened. Observers on the ground cannot see very much, and the combatants themselves have often "only a fragmentary memory" of the conflict. Firing at the aeroplanes from the ground seldom gives any result. The really vulnerable points in the machine are few. The aviator himself affords a very minute target, and it is extremely difficult for the artillerist or the riflemen to judge either the range or the allowance to be made for the speed of the machine. Rifle fire is nearly harmless. It is a common experience for aviators after descending to find bullet holes in their planes. The impact of the bullet is unheard in the roar of the engine, and they have no idea that the aeroplane has been hit. The small hole made by the bullet has no effect whatever on the sustaining power of the plane. The cutting of one of the wire stays, or a hit on the propeller, would be more serious, but these accidents seldom happen. Probably when we have the statistics of the war it will be found that more aviators have come to grief through the failure of their engines than from any attempt to bring them down by hostile fire.

Reconnaissance still remains the most useful work of the airman. On the eve of the victorious advance across the Marne, the British Flying Corps obtained in a few hours from Sir John French information as to the positions and movements of the enemy which no cavalry could have collected. But public attention had been more excited by what is still quite subsidiary use of aircraft—namely, aerial bombardment. Our authors discuss the subject very fully. They point out that bomb-dropping is still very much of a lottery. The aviator generally has to fly high and at great speed, and most people do not realize that it is absolutely impossible to drop a bomb on an object directly below him. When it is detached, the bomb has the same speed as the aeroplane. Its line of descent is, therefore, the composite of two forces—it's acquired velocity tending to drive it horizontally forward, and its weight drawing it vertically downwards. The result is that it must fall at some point well in front of that at which it was discharged. There are other sources of error—such as, for instance, the action of the wind on the projectile. If an aviator were flying from the eastward over London and let go a bomb when he was directly over St. Paul's, the cathedral would be absolutely safe from injury. The bomb would probably fall somewhere in the neighborhood of Fleet Street, the exact spot being further and further west according to the height of the aeroplane. To quote our authors:—

"Aviators are accused of barbarities of which they have no intention. A typical statement, and one quite wrong, is that, say, of an eye-witness, who walking with an ambulance wagon near a railway-station, declares that hostile airman passing overhead at the moment has dropped a bomb 'deliberately' at the ambulance. What has occurred really is that a bomb has fallen near the ambulance, but that the airman above has not had the faintest wish to place

it there. His aim was at the railway station. From his height he could not even see the ambulance. Of course, had he hit it by accident, the result would have been distressing; but the stigma should not be his that he aimed 'deliberately' at this mark. Could the man who is aloft make such accurate practice as this, were he able to drop a bomb near such a small target as an ambulance wagon provides, his bombs would not be falling wide of their mark at all, but would be dropping where he desired them to drop, and that is the station roof."

It is to the credit of our airmen that in their attacks they have continually taken the serious risk of flying low. This has not only made the attacks more effective, but must have tended to diminish accidental injury to non-combatants. Such injuries, however, are inevitable. As to attacks on cities, with a view to producing panic, our authors rightly point out that there is no essential difference between this proceeding and bombardment from guns placed on the ground. In war every place which is either fortified or contains military stores, or is occupied by troops, is liable to such bombardment. In the present war the very limited scale on which the attack has been made from the air and the small results obtained have produced, not panic, but irritation. Messrs. Grahame-White and Harper, in discussing the matter, come to a conclusion which, paradoxical as it sounds, is probably correct, that if aerial bombardment were carried out by a larger force and with greater results there would be more readiness to accept it as one of the ordinary incidents of war.

The last chapter is devoted to the question of "Aeroplane *versus* Airship." The opinion of the French General Cherfils is quoted to the effect that "the Zeppelin is a delicate monster, fragile, and condemned to an inability to ascend to any great height." But it seems to us that it is dangerous in the present stage of our knowledge to venture upon predictions as to what the airship will do. It is quite certain that in their last raid on Paris the Zeppelins flew at such a height that they were quite out of range of the anti-aircraft guns of the fortifications. We gather from what our authors say that even now they have a higher idea of the value of airships than they once held. If we recollect aright, Mr. Grahame-White's opinion once was that the aeroplane, which he himself has done so much to make an effective weapon, was the only aircraft really useful in war. He and his colleague now recognize that though the aeroplane has great advantages in the attack on an airship, there is more than one means of making the conflict more equal. They point out that before long, even if it has not already been done, the airship will be armed with quickfires of greater range and power than anything an aeroplane can carry. There is a certain analogy between the problems of aeroplane *versus* airship and torpedo boat *versus* battleship, and our authors tell us that:—

"Theoretically, and particularly at the present stage of its development, the airship should be guarded against the attack of aeroplanes in the same way as a Dreadnought is protected from hostile torpedo boats by a screen of light and quick-moving craft. On raid, for example, in which airships are carrying high explosives to drop them above a certain spot they should be surrounded as they fly by a patrol of defensive aeroplanes, which should meet and do battle with hostile craft of their own type, and prevent them from coming within striking distance of the airships. But aerial warfare, as practised to-day, has not emerged from its haphazard stage; and the airship if she sets out upon a raid shields herself only by the cloak of night."

In fact, the airship's business is not to fight aeroplanes but to avoid them. But our recent experience shows that the German airships are ready to take big risks. In the attack on the Tyne district they must have been over the North Sea during many hours of daylight. Perhaps the soundest course is to keep an open mind as to their possibilities, and, instead of underrating them, give them credit for rather more efficiency than the advocates of the aeroplane are inclined to attribute to them.

There are many other points of interest we might note in this remarkable book, but we have said enough to show that, whether it is regarded as an expert contribution to the literature of war or a record of splendid daring and enterprise, it is well worth reading.

SIR ROBERT BALL.

✓ *Reminiscences and Letters of Sir Robert Ball.*" By W. VALENTINE BALL. (Cassell. 16s. net.)

SIR ROBERT BALL numbered among his acquaintance almost as many men as anyone of his time. Many will remember the genial presence of the lecturer who could bend various arts to his service, who could illustrate science with poetry, and crown lucid exposition with sly jest. Others, again, will feel his memory ever fresh in a number of popular books which act as charming cicerones to "other worlds than ours." Not a few, all over the world, will remember the mathematician and man of science who explored an uncharted course in the most abstract of sciences, his work, in the competent judgment of Professor Chrystal, being "tarred with the brush of genius." And there must be a very host of friends who still mourn the loss of one so kindly and versatile and gay. To all of these it is safe to say this book will have much to reveal, for it shows Sir Robert Ball, not only as he met life in varying conditions and as he stood before his friends, but as life met him and as he stood before himself.

The preface explains that Sir Robert had in 1906 resolved to publish his reminiscences, and hence much of the work of this book lay ready to his son's hand. But the son has not hesitated frequently to comment on his father's notes; and the period of Sir Robert's residence at Cambridge has been wholly supplied from letters and accounts by Mr. Ball of his father's most important activities during that period. Sir Robert, interested in the history of his family, traced his ancestry back to the Balls of Devon in 1539. His kindred included a William Ball, who died in 1690, "an eminent astronomer," and Peter Ball, M.D., also a student of astronomy. In 1674 Robert Ball, of Bampton, Devon, emigrated to Youghal, Co. Cork, whence Sir Robert's father went to Dublin. The father was a keen student of science in his leisure hours, and was one of the founders of the Dublin "Zoo"; he attended the British Association meeting at Bristol in 1836, and there made the acquaintance of his future wife. The eldest son of the marriage, the subject of this book, was born in 1840; and his early days in Dublin were made memorable by a number of unusual delights. Their home in Dublin took color from their father's manifold activities, and housed a museum, a library, and for days, now and then, animals which had been purchased for the "Zoo" and were on their way to the gardens. There was a sloth hung on the back of a chair before the fire to make him comfortable, and a number of snakes who were found making their way up the stairs. Robert Ball grew up in this interesting atmosphere, preserving an Irish accent in spite of his mother's best precautions, which included residence at Dr. Brindley's school, near Chester. The few pages devoted to Dr. Brindley paint him as a man of such forceful charm that one would have had more of him. The school days were not over happy, but the boy came to his own in mathematics, and did not lack appreciation. He was finishing his school days when his father died, and in his mother's straitened circumstances he was allowed to proceed to Trinity College, Dublin, only on urgent promises to work hard. Entering at seventeen he redeemed his promises completely; became Lloyd Exhibitioner in 1860, and, in the following year, obtained a University Studentship of £100 a year for seven years.

Among his papers was found one written about this time which shows a strange preoccupation. After some speculation he notes that he has "not sufficiently practised (1) kindness, (2) moderation, (3) gentleness, (4) sufficient thought before speaking, (5) the repression of sarcastic habits." The next year, when barely of age, he sets down, at 5.30 a.m. of a January day, the observation that he had read through the above remarks and thought he had not made sufficient improvement. If those who knew him were canvassed as to what they found most remarkable in him, the majority would probably agree that it was his conspicuous kindness and affability. It was about the time when he was making these serious reflections that he went to hear Dickens and was surprised to find him look so much like "the colonel of a crack cavalry regiment." After several unsuccessful attempts to secure a Fellowship, Mr. Ball tried

to resign himself to the "very worst contingency that can happen"—a country curacy.

He was not, however, destined for the Church. In 1865 he accepted the position of tutor to Lord Rosse's sons on the understanding that he would be allowed to use the great reflecting telescope which Lord Rosse had set up at Parsonstown. This was his first association with the work in which he was later to win popular fame. Sir Robert describes his youngest pupil, the Hon. Charles Parsons, the future inventor of the turbine, as "always making all sorts of machines." Mr. Ball spent many nights in the observatory, often wearing only a light overcoat over his evening clothes. When Lord Rosse moved for the season to London, he took his sons' tutor with him, and Mr. Ball thus first made the acquaintance of many men of science, including Sir William Huggins. In 1867 Mr. Ball became professor of Applied Mathematics and Mechanism in the newly-founded Royal College of Science. In this position he commenced quantitative experimental mechanical work with the ingenious apparatus of Professor Willis, a line of teaching since developed with great ability by Professor Perry. It was about this time he joined the Royal Irish Academy and became a member of the Council of the Royal Zoological Society. He heard a lecture in 1869 which set him thinking upon a mathematical subject which became the constant and absorbing study of his life—the theory of screws, the investigation of certain spacial displacements which involve elements of the screw type. In 1874 he became Andrews Professor of Astronomy in the University of Dublin and Royal Astronomer of Ireland. He gives some interesting history of his predecessors in the office, and has numbers of good stories. One concerns Dom Pedro, Emperor of Brazil, who insisted on "doing" Dublin thoroughly—on his own terms. On Sunday morning he visited the Botanic Gardens, heard Mass, then insisted on seeing Sir Howard Grubb's equatorial, and tried to walk off with that gentleman's best hat, leaving his own "old cawbeen" in its stead. Mr. Ball's years as Royal Astronomer were full of work which was recognized by a knighthood in 1886.

Six years later he became Lowndean Professor of Astronomy and Geometry at Cambridge, and shortly afterwards Director of the Observatory there. He was elected a Fellow of Kings and was quickly at home in Cambridge life. He notes with surprise that "Cambridge is governed by comparatively young men." His period of control of the Observatory was not associated with any great observational work as was that of his predecessor, Adams, the discoverer of Neptune. He had already entered upon that life of lecturing which was to carry him all over the country and to America. Several times he gave the Christmas lectures at the Royal Institution. Three times he lectured in various parts of the United States. Generally he declined to lecture without fee, his reply to an invitation on one occasion containing the pertinent remark that he lectured "always on behalf of a certain married lady with five children, who is solely dependent upon her husband for support." He was, in fact, well paid; but he worked very hard to make his lectures as clear and interesting as possible. He had unusual powers of exposition, and wherever he appeared drew large and attentive audiences. For the last thirty years of his life he acted as Scientific Adviser to the Irish Lights Board, and rarely missed the annual cruise of inspection. He was a steady golfer, and a fascinating account of him in this character is contributed by Mr. J. D. Duff, Fellow of Trinity College, who partnered Sir Robert fairly regularly for ten years. During the last two years of his life Sir Robert was afflicted by a malady which prevented him doing active work, and at length proved fatal on November 25th, 1913. Professor E. T. Whittaker contributes, as an appendix, a *Catalogue Raisonné* of Sir Robert Ball's mathematical papers, a valuable piece of work which makes clear Sir Robert's claim to be remembered by men of science.

Throughout the book one is conscious of a vivid, kindly, and whimsical personality. Sir Robert Ball made an art of friendship, like a sister whose ingenious devices in this regard he delighted to describe. He was not a little intrigued with his fame: pleased, for instance, to be a distinguished guest at the annual dinner of the Authors' Society in 1900, when the best speech was made "it goes without

saying, by an Irishman, Mr. Bernard Shaw. . . . I never heard of him before." Above his deathbed was an almanac in which the favourite mottoes of various eminent men were entered. The key upon which he lived cannot be given more fittingly than in the words of one of these, noted from Carlyle in 1879: "Happy is the man who has found his work. Let him ask no other blessedness. He has a work, a life purpose; he has found it and will follow it."

LE GÉNÉRALISSIME.

"**My March to Timbuctoo.**" By GENERAL JOFFRE, with a Biographical Introduction by ERNEST DIMNET. (Chatto & Windus. 2s. net.)

THERE are few rarer things in literature than a convincing portrait of a great contemporary man of action who does not happen to be a great artist as well, or to have a great artist at his elbow. We know, or think we know, a good deal about Nelson and Napoleon, because both were artists themselves, after a fashion. Both unpacked their hearts in words, and to a great extent did their own dramaturgy. But what do we know of the true inwardness, say, of Marlborough? One thing at least seems certain, that a great man's own deeds and own words, however baffling or inexpressive, interpreted by an artist of genuine insight, are likely to be far more valuable towards the revelation of his undying self than any superficial views of "one who knew him." But the native ore is stubborn material, and is generally the final resource. For instance, one of the few copies in existence of the only book actually written by General Joffre, who has been for the greater part of a year so obviously one of the three or four most important men in the world, has lain all the while accessible to our whole nation, and duly catalogued, under the General's own name, in the British Museum Library. It is significant that for several months after the war had begun the pages remained—to the present writer's own knowledge—uncut! Here, anyhow, is this very book at last, duly and excellently translated, and furnished with a very pleasing and graceful "biography" by Abbé Dimnet. Of course, Abbé Dimnet is a charming writer. There is something delightful in the sheer contrast between the Abbé's easy gossip and the great General's stark and solid record of what was really one of the most romantic adventures that ever fell to the lot of man—the capture of Timbuctoo by the French in 1893. But does this hasty clapping together of a popular personal sketch and a document that is really like a lump of bee's-wax, needing only the artist to draw it out into the honeycomb—does it give us any truer idea of the Generalissimo himself? One fears it does not. How little it does so may be shown in the title chosen, which puts into the mouth of General Joffre a totally uncharacteristic, newspapery phrase which he would never have publicly used. His own title was "The Operations of the Joffre Column before and after the Occupation of Timbuctoo." In a word, this is Joffre in suspension, not in solution. Abbé Dimnet tells us little details of his family and career—that he was one of the eleven children of a hard-working cooper of the little town of Rivesaltes at the foot of the Pyrenees; that he possibly has Spanish blood in his veins; that he showed a talent for mathematics and engineering as a boy; that he came to Paris and the Ecole Polytechnique at fifteen; that he was a sub-lieutenant of Engineers in one of the Paris forts during the 1870 siege; that his progress in the French Army surprised his friends; that he is a man of few and halting words; that his "slow-going, bulky figure in a short coat and flat-brimmed tall hat" could be seen "going in and out of the War Office"; that "even now, people who meet him repeatedly see nothing in him except commonplace grandfatherly kindness." But where is the undoubtedly great man behind it all? We know there is a great man there. Lord Kitchener discovered it in a single interview. So did M. Briand. M. Millerand confirmed it in prolonged comradeship. Is there some secret magic by which great men reveal themselves to great men, and to them alone? It would almost seem so. It is all very well to talk of foresight, firmness, calmness, patriotism. These are generalities. The psychological problem of reconciling the "grandfather in the flat-brimmed hat" with the master-spirit who could "mercilessly" dismiss whole groups

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of generals and replace them by the right men without a word of effective complaint, and convey in a moment to the right people an invincible confidence in himself at the very hour when the hope of Europe was tottering—this is still unsolved.

But there are at least some little glimpses of a remarkable underlying character revealed in General Joffre's own "log" of that famous expedition along the banks of the Niger—a narrative far more worth reading on its own account than an apologetic reference would seem to claim. They do not so much suggest the "primitive" personality attested by Abbé Dimnet as a very acute and completely equipped intellect, marked by supreme tact and an overwhelmingly practical bent—which is, of course, the reverse of "primitive." One sees already the Kitchener-like completeness of care and detailed forethought and the tireless energy that heralded a great organizer. Even his own plain and modest tale cannot conceal the ability with which Colonel Joffre, as he then was, led his little band of fifty whites and a few hundred natives through the ceaseless dangers of that march between desert and flood, through a hostile, unknown, and pestilential country, whose native name means "God hears not." It needed, doubtless, just the faculties that go now to the directing of the greatest armament the world has seen. It is not to be forgotten that Colonel Joffre succeeded where a brilliant superior officer, Colonel Bonnier, met defeat and death. But still, this is not the most wonderful thing about the Joffre journal. It is rather the utter absence of any concession to the inessential, from the practical point of view. Those of us, for example, who have read M. Dubois's entrancing account of a visit to "Timbuctoo, the Mysterious," shortly after "Colonel Jouffre's" (*sic*) occupation—a book that reads like a fairytale but is simple truth from an "eye-witness"—would hardly believe that anyone could plant his country's flag in this city of immemorial legend, this hitherto unapproachable Queen of the Desert, without showing, even in an official retrospect, some small sign of a sense of the romance of the exploit. But no! Joffre's accounts of the most thrilling adventurous sallies (such as the swimming of lakes by storming parties) against the Tuaregs, those terrible "Veiled Men" of the Western Soudan, might be records of so much cabbage-cutting. His midnight conferences with friendly chiefs, in the lonely tent beneath the stars, only stir him to regret the small practical results accruing in proportion to the time spent. Is it possible that great deficiencies are more of a help to great qualities than is sometimes supposed in the making of a great man? Is it possible that this is part of the answer to the riddle of Joseph Jacques Césaire Joffre?

EXTRAVAGANCE.

"Loneliness." By ROBERT HUGH BENSON. (Hutchinson. 6s.)
 "You Never Know Your Luck." By Sir GILBERT PARKER. (Hodder & Stoughton. 6s.)
 "The Sword of Youth." By JAMES LANE ALLEN. (Macmillan. 6s.)
 "Miss Bryde of England." By ALICE GRANT ROSMAN. (Melrose. 6s.)

LONGINUS, in his treatise "On the Sublime," is up in arms far more against an abuse than a skin-and-bones style. In his opinion, the process which leads from the sublime to the ridiculous is just that superfluous inflation which capsizes the whole material. Exaggerations are the "tumors" on the body artistic. And reading average modern novels makes one think that there is no need to court extravagance by attempting the sublime. The latter is simply left out. Extravagance carries the position unaided.

The late Monsignor Benson's "Loneliness," for instance, queers its own pitch. It is the story of a Catholic *prima donna*—Marion Tenterden, who achieves the *summa felicitas* at Covent Garden, and by engaging herself to marry an aristocratic young drone called Max Merival. Difficulties about the "no temere" decree induce her to repel Catholicism and to take the fullest advantage of her opportunities for happiness. Then an operation on her throat destroys her power as a creative artist, with the result

that she throws Max over and dedicates herself exclusively to religion. Monsignor Benson obviously writes, not as an artist who sifts and selects his observations with a view to artistic coherence, but as a missionary who arbitrarily weighs them down with a view to a propagandist impression: and surely he does the worst possible service to his faith by representing it, not only as the foe to the creative impulse, but as employing destruction and impotence as its instrument. It is a return to the Renaissance Spanish view of Catholicism. The religious writer, in fact, cannot have his way nowadays by ignoring life, but by testing its ultimate values.

Sir Gilbert Parker's "You Never Know Your Luck" is as casual a romance as we ever remember to have read. Its plot is so hastily manufactured that it cannot possibly stand upon its own legs without the devices of stilts, cross-traverses, and supports with which the author props it up. Its style, for one thing, is one long struggle (it speaks of a neat woman as "spectacularly finessed") to make the smaller look like the greater. Shiel Crozier, who runs through his father's patrimony by betting and deserts his wife on the paltriest of excuses, is the hero. At Asknatoon, a little town at the foot of the Rockies, he plays the Red Cross Knight with Kitty Tynan, "a symphony in gold," as his convenient Una. When his wife (who should have had more sense) comes over to rejoin him, he, in the language of pioneers, "gives her the bird," but is reconciled to her when she presents him with four thousand pounds, which, apparently, she had won at a race-meeting with his money. Whereupon our hero waltzes home to Ireland and prosperity, leaving his symphony to contemplate in retrospect the moral stimulus of having, for once in a way, met nobility in the flesh.

"The Sword of Youth" is an up-to-date romance of the American Civil War. As the curtain rises we see the gaunt, brooding mother of fighting sons, bending in the sunset over her knitting. Her son, Joe Sumner, with a strange light in his eyes, comes home from his marketing. He announces his intention of joining the armies of the South. He kisses his sweetheart farewell and is gone. In the next reel of the film we see Joe striding hand in hand with his comrade among the camp-fires of the desperate Southerners. A courier rides up. A letter for Joe. His mother is dying; he "must no longer tarry." His friend, who happens to be on picket duty that night, lets him through. He returns home, but his mother has passed into the great Shadow-Land. He sets out again to rejoin the still more desperate Southerners. He falls fainting among their lines, and is pardoned by General Lee, who knows true greatness when he sees it. The army surrenders:—"A few hours later a great American, a great soldier (*i.e.*, Lee), wearing his great white sword, quietly went to meet another great American, another great soldier, wearing his great white sword. The two spoke simply, briefly together, as was the habit of their natures—and there was peace." And Joe went home to her, "with life's flame on his mouth." "For there was peace."

The theme of "Miss Bryde of England" is the simple and straightforward one of the entire helplessness of people who have got nothing to do. To the dispassionate eye, it is so obvious as hardly to warrant writing a long novel about it. But, inasmuch as one's duty to the present generation largely consists in the careful exposition of truisms, Miss Rosman's book is a valuable and necessary document. The author's subject is the odyssey of Helen Bryde from the narrow and useless harborage of her dependent life at Caston Hall, her parents' home, to the wide and difficult seas of personal choice and liberty. And the analysis of Helen's gradual achievement of self-reliance and happiness at the expense of her old habits of thought, is, for a novelist's first book, an unusually skilful one. There are, as one might expect, a good many faults in the author's treatment. The style is amateurish, and the dialogue rarely escapes from self-consciousness. But it is a very promising first novel, and if Miss Rosman can in the future make her technique adequate to her sincerity and clear-sightedness she should make her mark.

